

*“My role is to imagine what the social dimensions might be, even though the eventual applications of the science aren’t yet clear.”*

*Robert Doubleday, See Through Science, Demos, p55*

### **Material Beliefs Collaborations**

*This document is designed to provide a guide for setting up collaborations between designers and engineering groups.*

<http://www.materialbeliefs.com/collaboration>

## *Material Beliefs*

# Material Beliefs Collaborations

This document is designed to provide a guide for setting-up collaborations between designers and engineering groups.

## Background and partners

Material Beliefs is funded by the EPSRC through their Public Engagement Programme, which aims to “stimulate greater understanding about the issues and opportunities that arise from research” (from <http://www.epsrc.ac.uk/PublicEngagement/Aims.htm> on 3/08/07).

The project is based in the Interaction Research Studio, Department of Design at Goldsmiths, University of London, and is building partnerships with engineering departments in UK universities.

It is also building an informal network of designers, engineers, science communicators, social scientists and other academics.

## Aims

Material Beliefs is building collaborations between engineers and designers. The aim is to explore shared areas of interest, and generate a body of work for public exhibition, discussion-events and publications. The project will explore innovative approaches to public engagement, and the outcomes aim to open up a reflective and critical space around the cultural impact of new technology.

With this in mind, Material Beliefs aims to:

- Enable scientists and engineers to build links between their research activity and cultural institutions.
- Challenge the working methods of designers by deepening their experience of science and engineering.
- Embed engineering research within material culture, so that a broad audience can interpret it.
- Develop innovative models of engagement between science and the everyday, academia and the publics.

## Themes

Material Beliefs will focus on recent technologies which challenge the boundaries between our bodies and technology. In addition it will explore our embeddedness within cultural and institutional networks. How can we deploy design to invigorate a public discussion about these social and material hybrids?

## Benefits

There are a range of benefits and opportunities for these collaborations, both for the participating institution and individual researchers and staff. It's important that there are clear benefits for everyone involved, and these should be discussed at the outset.

For the department/research group there is a chance to work collaboratively on a public engagement project with a group of outside professionals. This will put the research in front of a range of potentially new audiences, and is likely to generate media interest and esteem. The process will also build access to a broad network of other academics and professionals.

For individuals there is a chance to stand back from the focus of their research, and see their work differently, and how it is interpreted and appreciated by others. The collaboration is likely to offer support for engagement activities they have wanted to do but not started. There will also be opportunities to speak about and promote work with others.

### **Time-scale**

The collaboration takes place over a one year period, leading to a series of exhibition and public engagement events in autumn 2008. The funding period ends in December 2008.

It is imagined that there are two broad phases to the collaboration. The first half is exploratory and reflective, and the second half is about synthesising and making.

### **Resources**

Material Beliefs has a financial package of up to £5000 for each collaborating department. This can be used by the collaborating group to help meet costs. This might include buying out some of the researchers time and travel, contributing towards consumable costs or equipment hire.

There might also be potential for the collaborating department to apply for money to match this amount, internally (if there is a public engagement resource within the institution) or externally.

### **Work-plan**

A plan of work should be negotiated between the collaborators. This will be discussed at the outset, and though it is likely to change, it helps manage expectations.

Contact time might happen in bursts, or weekly hourly meetings, over email etc. It's also worth thinking about who will be the main point of contact, and who else within the department or group will be a part of the collaboration, including researchers, technicians and students.

The collaboration might fall anywhere within a range of contact and involvement, from occasional visits and meetings, to residencies.

### **Outcomes**

The project would work towards a range of outcomes, including designed objects, writing, and documentation using film and photography, to be presented at

exhibition, via the project website, and at larger live discussion events. Smaller events are planned in response to the development of the each collaboration, to push the work into unexpected territories including higher education seminars and workshops.

Material Beliefs is currently discussing exhibition possibilities with the contemporary programme team at the Victoria & Albert Museum and other museums and galleries.

### **Accuracy and copyright**

Project outcomes aim to provoke discussion, and generate interest in the potential social roles for technology. This is likely to happen through the speculative form of scenarios, rather than the development of “real” product prototypes.

For the audience, the material of science and engineering research then becomes linked to familiar, everyday contexts in meaningful ways. It’s important to get the science and engineering part right, and balance this with the social and cultural implications of technology usage, to create a bold narrative with scientific depth.

It’s also important to have a clear picture of how the work is being disseminated, and that everyone is happy about these outputs. This might be negotiated as opportunities arise, and continue beyond the projects timeframe.

### **Evaluation**

The evaluation process will complement the collaborative nature of the project with the involvement of the both the engineers and the designers in steering its direction.

The collaborators will use the project website to record, and reflect on their processes of research, production, and public engagement. It will provide both a space for internal evaluation and link them to exhibition and event partners, industry and members of the public.

The Material Beliefs project manager will structure a process with collaborators that creates agreed success criteria and indicators. It will focus on determining what questions need to be asked at each stage of the project to explore success, and what processes and outcomes are recorded and shared throughout and on completion of the project.

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